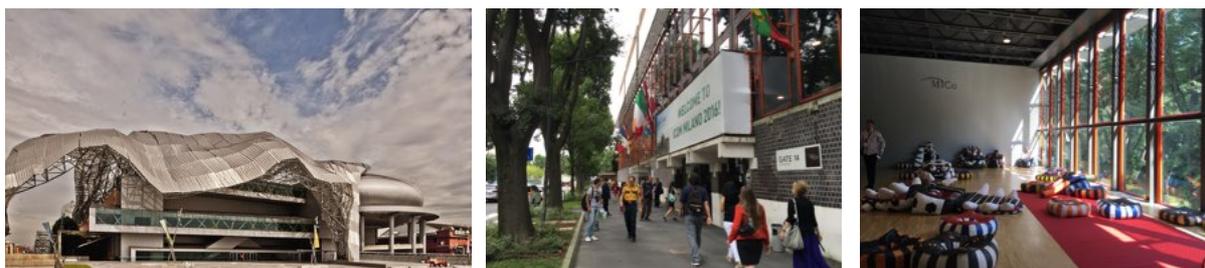


ICOM General Conference Milan 2016: Museums and cultural landscapes

The ICOM General Conference 2016 was held in Milan between 3rd and 9th July 2016. The conference was organised jointly by the ICOM Paris secretariat, ICOM executive board and ICOM Italy. The majority of the conference took place at MiCo (Milan Conference centre) situated a little to the north of the city centre and easily accessible by the metro system. Other venues were spread throughout the city museums and cultural heritage institutions. The conference was attended by over 3500 delegates from 140 countries, which provided a diverse mix of professionals within the museum world.



Images:

Left: MiCo conference Centre (photo Wikipedia); Centre: Entrance to Conference; Right: MiCo facilities (photos Kate Seymour)

Plenary sessions opened the conference programme for the first three days at the MiCo venue. The programme was supplemented by specialist sessions organised by almost all of the various ICOM International (30) and many of the National Committees (119), as well as affiliated organisations such as Blue Shield. This provided a varied, interesting and packed programme, although this was at times challenging to navigate and it was difficult choose which session to attend. Wednesday saw the launch of the new ICOM logo to mark the 70th Anniversary of the organisation. Thursday was dedicated to off-site sessions organised by the International Committees hosted by local museums and institutions. Friday comprised of excursions to nearby cities and venues also organised by the specialist groups. In addition a large trade fair offered delegates the chance to find useful and relative materials, instruments and expertise for all aspects of museum activity. The conference was accompanied by a special exhibition celebration 70 years of ICOM. This included photos, a 20 minute documentary and overview schematic which focused on ICOM's roots, how the organisation has grown and its outreach since 1946.

Images:

Top Left: Opening Ceremony; Top Right: Opening address by Hans-Martin Hinz (ICOM President)
Bottom left: Opening party at Castello Sforzesco; Bottom Right: Closing Event at Triennale (photos Kate Seymour)



Furthermore, the evenings were filled with official events hosted by the main musea in Milan allowing the delegates to socialise under more relaxed circumstances and explore the wealth of cultural heritage offered by the city. These events included the opening party at Castello Sforzesco attended by the majority of the delegates and the closing event on Saturday 9th July at the Museum of Design (Triennale). Other events included a concert and climb to the roof of the Duomo, and evening cocktails at the Museum of Science and Technology. The conference concluded on Saturday with the elections of the new ICOM Executive Committee and the voting on the resolution on cultural landscapes. The team for the next (25th) General Conference (1-7 September 2019) from Kyoto were handed the ICOM flag at the closing event.

The conference gave me the opportunity not only to network with those within the International Committee to which I belong, ICOM-CC Conservation, but also with members from other International Committees and specialised groups. The ICOM-CC triennial programme runs slightly off timing from the ICOM General Conference by one year, which means that members often have little contact with the parent body. ICOM Milan was thus a perfect opportunity to explore other ICOM International Committees and widen my ICOM experience. The venue city of Milan and the generous funding by ICOM Netherlands allow me to encounter the full force of the ICOM brand. While I have difficulty before the conference deciding on sessions to attend, discussions with other delegates opened up the meeting and I experienced a full and diverse schedule ranging from disaster relief to interior ensembles. The conference smart phone app did help to navigate between the sessions. Unfortunately, timings were not strictly held to and some planned talks and discussions were thus missed. I attended all the sessions held by ICOM-CC, which gave me the opportunity to strengthen my connections within this group. The off-site visit on Thursday to the Brera Gallery was especially interesting. Not only was the conservation of a large panel painting explained by the in-house paintings conservator within the 'visible conservation laboratory', but also the explanation of the museum climate system and the visits to the open storage were of interest. The new British director welcomed us and placed the words of the Italian Minister for Culture from the opening day in context. Here the Director explained the modernisation of the Italian cultural landscape by the appointment of 20 new directors in key institutions, 7 of which are non-Italian, and the free opening of musea on the first Sunday of the month to revitalise these cultural institutions.

The conference also gave me the opportunity to network with non-western museum representatives. There was a large contingent of delegates from Africa and South Asia. This was an excellent moment for the promotion of an upcoming event which will be organised by the ICOM-CC Education and Training in Conservation Working Group, of which I am the current Coordinator. This event will take place at the National Research Laboratory Centre in Lucknow, India in December 2016. The two day



Images:

Top Left: MiCo ICOM Trade Fair; Top Right: The new ICOM-Nederland logo; Bottom left: Dinner with members of the ICOM-CC board; Bottom Right: Representatives from IGNCA, New Delhi (photos Kate Seymour)

event will highlight education and training of conservators in South Asia with keynote speakers and a discussion panel. I met with a number of potential speakers during the week in Milan.

The theme of the conference stressed for me that cultural heritage is a landscape without boundaries or borders. The meeting showed how collections and their care need to be integrated and how preservation and conservation of these precious commodities are essential in terms of non economic value. Encountering like minded people during the intense week allowed me to strengthen networks essential for both institutional and personal development. Sharing good practices also helps the field move forward. I am most appreciative of ICOM-Nederland for giving me funding to attend the conference.